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UNCLAS VATICAN 001329

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE RELAYS CONCERNS ABOUT SITUATION IN
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO; SEEKS U.S. SUPPORT

1. (SBU) THE HOLY SEE OUTLINED ITS CONCERNS ABOUT MOUNTING UNREST IN THE NORTHEASTERN REGION OF ITURI IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC) IN A NOTE PASSED TO EMBASSY MARCH 24. THE VATICAN IS CALLING ON THE PARTIES TO "RESPECT AGREEMENTS ALREADY SIGNED AND RESUME NEGOTIATIONS." THE HOLY SEE, WITH CLERGY IN COMMUNITIES ON ALL SIDES OF THIS MULTIFACETED CONFLICT, IS CLEARLY CONCERNED THAT RECENT GAINS IN THE CONGO PEACE PROCESS ARE AGAIN AT RISK FROM THE MILITARY OCCUPATION OF BUNIA BY THE UGANDAN ARMED FORCES. THEY HAVE ASKED US TO BRING THEIR CONCERNS TO THE DEPARTMENT'S ATTENTION AND WOULD APPRECIATE U.S. SUPPORT FOR THEIR POSITION AS OUTLINED IN THEIR PRO-MEMORIA NOTE TO ENCOURAGE ADHESION TO THE AGREEMENTS AND RESUMPTION OF NEGOTIATIONS.

2. (SBU) THE TEXT OF THE NOTE FOLLOWS:

BEGIN TEXT:

IN RECENT TIMES, THE ALREADY COMPLICATED SITUATION IN THE NORTHEASTERN REGION OF ITURI (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO) HAS INCREASINGLY WORSENER, INCLUDING A MILITARY OCCUPATION OF THE CITY OF BUNIA BY THE UGANDAN ARMED FORCES (UPDF) WHO HAVE CAUSED THE MILITIA OF THE MOVEMENT UNION DES PATRIOTES CONGOLAIS (UPC) TO FLEE. THE GOVERNMENT OF KIGALI HAS PUBLISHED A DECLARATION THREATENING A REPOSITIONING OF RWANDAN TROOPS IN CONGO: "IF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAS FOUND IT ACCEPTABLE FOR UGANDA TO RETURN TO THE DRC, FOR ALL THE DUBIOUS REASONS IT HAS GIVEN, THEN IT IS LEGITIMATE THAT RWANDA SHOULD GO IN THE DRC TO CONTAIN THIS NEW SITUATION" (STATEMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND REGIONAL COOPERATION, MARCH 14TH, 2003).

IN THIS REGARD, THE HOLY SEE EXPRESSES ITS CONCERN OVER THE FORESEEABLE CONSEQUENCES THAT SUCH A POSITION WILL HAVE ON THE STRAINED PEACE PROCESS IN THE REGION, AS WELL AS ON THE CIVIL POPULATION SUFFERING THE VIOLENCE OF THE VARIOUS ARMED GROUPS FIGHTING IN THAT REGION.

FOR THESE REASONS, THE HOLY SEE ASKS THE INTERESTED PARTIES TO AVOID FURTHER SUFFERING OF UNARMED CIVILIANS, TO RESPECT THE AGREEMENT FOR THE CEASE-FIRE AND TO WITHDRAW FOREIGN TROOPS FROM CONGOLESE TERRITORY, TO RESUME NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE IN THE AREA AND TO PUT INTO PLACE A TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.

THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE HAS ASKED THE APOSTOLIC Nuncios IN THE INTERESTED COUNTRIES, AS WELL AS THE PERMANENT OBSERVERS TO THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION IN NEW YORK AND GENEVA, TO PRESENT THESE CONCERNS TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS. AT THE SAME TIME, IT APPEALS TO THOSE GOVERNMENTS WHICH MAINTAIN CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE AFRICAN COUNTRIES OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION, URGING BOTH THEM AND THE MILITIA TO WORK MORE DECISIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY TOWARDS A LASTING PEACE.

FROM THE VATICAN, 24 MARCH 2003.

END TEXT

3. (SBU) COMMENT: BECAUSE THE HOLY SEE HAS CLERGY ON ALL SIDES OF THIS CONFLICT, THEY HAVE GENERALLY AVOIDED TAKING STANDS ON ANY SIDE OF THE CONFLICT. THEIR DECISION TO ENGAGE AT THIS TIME WITH A NOTE TO ALL INTERESTED PARTIES AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS ENGAGED IN THE PEACE EFFORT REFLECTS THEIR FEAR THAT THE PROGRESS ATTAINED TO DATE IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION IS AT RISK OF FALLING APART. IT ALSO RESPONDS TO A RECENT ADMONITION FROM THE POPE, WHO CAUTIONED IN A RECENT AUDIENCE THAT, IN THE FACE OF THE FOCUS ON IRAQ, THAT THE WORLD NOT NEGLECT THE MANY OTHER WARS AND CONFLICTS THAT THREATENED HUMANITY.

NICHOLSON

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2003VATICA01329 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED